

# Recycling Section Stresses Waste Management



**Recycling Staff: Karen Fisher-Brasher, Mia Townsel (Permits Division), Mona Miller, and John Rogers**

**K**eeping Louisiana clean is a way of life for the staff of DEQ's Recycling Section. To them, effective waste management is the key to identifying and solving problems concerning refuse throughout the state.

When speaking of waste management, Karen Fisher-Brasher and John Rogers, who work in the Recycling section, want people to remember to reduce, reuse, recycle, and buy recycled products. The first part of waste management concerns the recycling of commercial, industrial, and household waste. Industry realized a number of years ago that waste represents inefficiency and they began creating ways to reuse their byproducts. The companies came to realize that the waste they were depositing in already crowded landfills had a value. John Rogers, a Recycling Coordinator, says, "Industry looks at recycling as a way of reducing the cost of operation. As waste management systems become more sophisticated, we are seeing a trend to reduce waste and increase recycling because it's (waste) a cost." Reducing waste limits the need for disposal.

A second facet to waste management is waste minimization, which means not generating the waste in the beginning. Karen Fisher-Brasher, the Program Manager of the Recycling section, says, "We ask people to do all they can to minimize the volume of waste they are generating. If you are going to paint a house, you need to know how much paint the job will need. Don't go out and buy 25 gallons of paint if you have a 15 gallon room or building that you're painting." If a person does not generate the waste, they will not have to worry about disposing of excess material or the harmful effects that the waste will have on the environment.

One of the section's major tasks is helping local governments throughout the state manage waste. The Recycling group provides these entities with information about the latest trends in handling waste, market sources (local landfills and recyclers), and gives them assistance in locating facilities around the state that manufacture products with recycled content. The answers the Recycling section gives vary because the needs and resources of each region are different. The governments they deal with range from sparsely populated rural parishes that do not have curbside waste collection to densely populated areas with proactive collection programs like Baton Rouge. Louisiana does not have any comprehensive waste control legislation, so the Recycling section staff must be very knowledgeable and sensitive to the individual needs of local governments and their service providers.

A major problem facing the local governments in Louisiana and others across the nation is finding landfills to take their waste. John Rogers says, "As the total number of landfills reduces, the cost of garbage disposal goes up." Part of the solution is recycling and the other is reducing the amount of waste being produced. Because of the burden of cost to local governments and the public, the Recycling section has been promoting the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sponsored "Pay as You Throw" program for the last two years.

**T**he "Pay as You Throw" program began approximately 30 years ago in the Seattle area. The principle behind the program is to treat waste management as a utility instead of having blanket payments for a service area. Karen pointed out the reasoning when she said, "You don't pay your neighbor's electric bill. Why should you pay for

his garbage service?" Under the program, the more garbage a person produces, the more he/she will have to pay.

The "Pay as You Throw" program is currently being used in over 4,000 communities nationwide. Using this system for waste collection has been proven to solve many problems for local governments. The program identifies what the true waste costs are for a community and provides a straightforward mechanism for dispersing them. Under this system, more people recycle instead of throwing things away to crowd the already overburdened landfills. Consumers also keep waste minimization in mind when they go shopping. Over 99% of the communities that have used the "Pay as You Throw" program like it and see it as a benefit. John says, "Garbage in a landfill doesn't go away; it continues to be a burden. The tax base of the future, our children and our grandchildren, will have to deal with it."

**T**he Recycling section also performs the vital task of reaching out to the public and educating them about recycling and ways to keep the environment clean. The section participates in teacher workshops year round. Karen says, "If you can train the trainer, then you can reach more people statewide." The group also attends many conferences and educational fairs. They provide hands on demonstrations on recycling issues.

In November, the section participated in "ChemFriends" in Ascension Parish. The program was designed as a cooperative effort with area industry to inspire young people to learn more about math and chemistry. The



**John Rogers, a Recycling Coordinator in the Recycling section, performs an experiment for children at the "ChemFriends" program held in Gonzalez.**

Recycling group often works in partnerships to put on these types of programs. During these events, the Recycling group performs demonstrations specifically designed to speak to their audience. At "ChemFriends", the group taught children the importance of keeping a balanced pH (chemical balance), and its impact on our water bodies. The participants also learned how to make pH indicators with the materials available in most kitchens. Other large events for the Recycling section include Earth Day, the many household hazardous waste days throughout the state, America Recycles Day (raises awareness to buy recycled content), and DEQ's Annual Waste Conference.

During the year, DEQ's Recycling group has thousands of opportunities to talk to people about recycling. They are a source of information for calls inquiring about places to recycle, types of materials that need to be recycled, or programs that citizens or governments wish to set up in their areas. ♻️



***If you have questions and wish to contact the Recycling section please call:***

**Used Oil and Recycling Hotline: 1-800-305-6621**